Freedom for Political Prisoners!

Newsletter dedicated to Belarusian political prisoners

Criminal proceedings against Ales Mikhalevich will not stop until he returns to the country?



The Investigators gave a negative reply to the request of Ales Mikhalevich, in which the former presidential candidate and the KGB detention center inmate, asks for redemption of the criminal proceedings initiated against him. Mikhalevich to this day is a suspect in the investigation of the organization of "mass riots" in Minsk, December 19, 2010, as the government called a number of organized protests against rigged presidential election.

The answer for a politician in exile was signed by **Mr. Sukalo**, the head of the investigation department for offenses against public transport of the Investigative Committee in Minsk. The letter notifies that the decision to discontinue the investigation may be taken only if Mr. Mikhalevich shows up in Belarus.

Ales Mikhalevich published a copy of the letter of the Investigative Committee on his Facebook profile. *"Nearly two months ago, on the advice of my lawyers, I submitted a request to the Investigative Committee for discontinuance of criminal proceedings against me. And here's the answer"*, - wrote politician.

Ales Mikhalevich expressed surprise that "others were given permission to discontinue the proceedings without having them appear".

Ales Mikhalevich, like most of presidential candidates, was detained in the night of December 20, 2010. He was released on recognizance from a KGB detention center one month later. He organized a press conference to share his experience about tortures in pretrial detention. In March 2011, Mikhalevich secretly fled Belarus and was granted political asylum in the Czech Republic. Mikhalevich was detained for several times in foreign airports as a person wanted by Belarusian authorities via Interpol but would be eventually released after involvement of political authorities.

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Sieviaryniec: Father Lazar is another hostage of the authorities



Paval Sieviaryniec, co-chairman of Belarusian Christian Democracy party, told in an interview to Belarusian Partisan, why Lukashenka kidnapped as a hostage Catholic priest Uladzislau Lazar, and called on the clergy to join the campaign of collecting signatures for a petition calling for the release of the priest.

After the case of Andrej Hajdukov no one does believe in the spy investigations of KGB. It is obvious to everyone. After explosions in metro and counterterrorism trials everyone knows that if the process is closed, it is not fair or there is pressure exerted on a public opinion. I think in this particular case, we have both these factors. The silence of the church is somewhat surprising. Of course, it is more diplomatic to be silent when we are dealing with the criminal trial, but here we are dealing with the regime. Church leaders know that the priest is innocent – said Paval Sieviaryniec, who himself is a political prisoner.

Mr. **Sieviaryniec** believes that in case of priest Lazar, the authorities could use house arrest and a ban on leaving the place of residence, but not an immediate arrest.

-Signatures must be gathered, both in electronic form and in churches. The public opinion should demand to release priest Lazar. I hope that the church will intervene, as many priests in Belarus are wondering what will happen if something similar happens to them. Here it is necessary to express solidarity and support the request for unconditional release of the priest. I think that he is another hostage. Will he be needed to talk with the West, or to put pressure on the Vatican, it does not matter. And let the representatives of other religions and social groups do not think it concerns only the catholic church – said the leader of BCD.

When asked what would happen to priest Lazar in the near future, Mr. Sieviaryniec said that the regime already has experience in the detention of the hostages: What happened to Lazar is the next level of the process. The idea is to grab the priest, the man associated with the organization that does not belong to state; to which belongs according to various estimates, from one million to one and a half million members in Belarus. Lukashenko will not give up in this case. The method is coarse, but effective in this case.Until Lukashenko is stopped he will continue to do what he does. And he can only be stopped by the Belarusian people, with God's help. Therefore, I believe that if in the tens and hundreds of parishes people will gather signatures for the release of Father Lazar, such a campaign will not be ignored even by Lukashenko. He'll have to release the priest without putting any conditions. I think that if all bishops have started to collect signatures, or support such an action, the matter would be resolved within a few days.

Paval Sieviaryniec confirmed that the BCD party began collecting signatures in front of the churches, and calls on all Catholics to join in on the action, or to take to the streets to collect signatures under the demand to release Father Lazar. The petition was signed by more than 1,000 people.

(Father Vladislav Lazar in the picture) belaruspartisan.org

Maryna Adamovich: The most important request to the authorities is the rehabilitation of political prisoners

Rehabilitation of political prisoners should remain a basic demand from the authorities of Belarus – says Maryna Adamovich, wife of political prisoner and former presidential candidate Mikola Statkevich.

Maryna Adamovich cites the fragment of **Mikola Statkevich's** letter sent from Mahilou prison, in which he is serving his sentence:

*- Personally, I'm worried about what's going on around the issue of political prisoners. Human rights activists have proposed to stop requiring rehabilitation of political prisoners. They asked via Facebook to support this position. However, my answer was not not*ified and have no influence over the condition of those concerned.

According to Maryna Adamovich, Mikola Statkevich believes that regardless of the situation, the possibilities and reality of the present, the most important demand is rehabilitation of all victims of political judgments in Belarus. And we must not under any circumstances resign from this demand.

racyja.com

Irina Chalip: In a legal sense, we are all political prisoners, so long as the regime lasts

Why machinery of repression in Belarus is so developed? Why do people who work in the police, the KGB, prisons agree to follow orders that are often in conflict with the law, and contrary to human conscience and morality? For palitviazni.info spoke Irina Chalip, Russian correspondent of "Novaya Gazeta" in Belarus,wife of politician, presidential candidate Andrei Sannikov.

Irina Chalip: *This is not a national trait, and we'd rather should look for the historical roots here,in the long history of keeping people in intimidation what is practiced by generations , thus deformation of human consciousness and conscience follow. They think that they are exempt from liability each time they do a vicious order.In other words, there is a significantly larger scale of evil, but I am only a small man, and I have my life, I have to earn somehow to feed the family. If I go to a small compromise with my conscience, nothing would happen. And a whole responsibility in their view, held that evil. And that's the mistake.They do not understand that everyone will be responsible. Not accidentally in the whole world responsibility for the offence is born not only by the direct perpetrator, but the one who ordered this crime too.*

- However, cases of commission of such crimes are not noticed as a single ones nowadays.How widespread is the practice of torture and exceeding the limits of law-abidingnes?

Irina Chalip: *I think this is a working system, not a collection of local cases. We crossed a critical mass above which the events exceeded the limits of the law.And we have to admit it honestly. And this is a national tragedy. It's sad if somebody doesn't notice that.*

- Do people know about this? Or does the public still lack something to this?

Irina Chalip: *Most of all they lack the understanding that no one is really safe. As long as there is a presence of overwhelming dissatisfaction with the general situation, the authorities and life , some element of naive and baseless hope smolders, that I would somehow miss it all. With me it does not have the right to happen , after all, I do not overreach. And until such thinking is cultivated, it will be hard. Attitudes like that are just immoral. At least I can see it this way. It is as if you might want to live quietly alongside the ongoing fighting in the front line. If you are silent, the worse for you.*

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Andrzej Poczobut: The regime does everything to intimidate the society



Prison administrations still require from political prisoners to sign requests for clemency. Why and for what purpose this practice, under which against political prisoners are used extreme methods, including torture, is being exercised? Reporter of palitviazni.info spoke with journalist and correspondent for Gazeta Wyborcza, Andrzej Poczobut.

Andrzej Poczobut: *Tortures are actually quite common in prisons. Mykola Statkevich confirmed this in one of his last letters send from behind bars. It is obvious that the authorities wish the convicted to repent, they want an apology. And it is a constant tactic, independent of the dialogues, visits and contacts. These requests allow, allegedly, the authorities to save face.*

- It is known, however, that this game is fundamentally dishonest. In view of that fact, do the requests can better the image of the authorities? Will it be possible to continue putting a good face on a bad business, because some political prisoners were acquitted?

Andrzej Poczobut: *A number of politicians and social activists, accused of participating in Ploshcha-2010 have been acquitted. However, we should not talk here about a political thaw, or even associate these events with visits of Belarusian officials in the European Union. These are the objective facts indicating that the prisoners finished their sentences and the whole process can no longer be artificially maintained. On the other hand, the fabrication of new accusations of political prisoners could stand in the plans of the official Minsk, and more specifically in the game, in which plays the regime.*

- After introducing sanctions against foreign minister, Makey, it was said that Minsk would probably never go to any concessions, and will use ending sentences of prisoners only for propaganda purposes, as a gesture of good will. Is such misinformation is possible?

Andrzej Poczobut: *No, because it is an absolute lie. We are dealing here with an objective process, with the expiration of incarceration. I think that no one in Europe believes the deadlines of judgments as concessions on the part of the Belarusian regime. It is possible that there is a kind of people who interpret any of the information in their own way. Maybe there will be distributed opinions that this is a sign of liberalization, but in reality, what is happening now is simply the implementation of a particular style of politics. It lacks the movement towards liberalization, at the same time the restrictions are not increased. But society is still extremely intimidated. However, the political situation in Belarus continues to remind stagnation, and the level of fear in society remains unchanged. The authorities with its moves and implementation of certain processes indicates immutability of course aimed at repression.*

- So it seems that cases of some prisoners are a symptom of the extension of this policy?

Andrzej Poczobut: *Once again, it appears that the Belarusian regime is not going to deviate from the policy of repression against the opposition. Therefore, if the regime will start to believe that the society should be intimidated, the harassment would continue. The regime does not have to make an effort to find another victim. I noticed that what happens now is a continuation of the current practice. Today, many like to mention the years 2008-2010, as the years of the alleged liberalization. However, these words should be verified by Mykola Autukhovich who exactly at that time was tried and imprisoned. Therefore, for the authorities of Belarus and the Belarusian regime it is important not only to control the society, but also to maintain a certain level of fear in it. And the other games with the European Union – are secondary things. If there are actions beneficial to the authorities, we will not have long to wait.almost certain that they will smuggle information outside the prison walls.*

Sasha Kulayeva: Even after the release political prisoners are subject to restrictions



Actions of solidarity with Belarusian civil society took place literally all over the world. The sad fact is that, solidarity with political prisoners could express citizens of many countries, but not citizens of Belarus. FIDH Paris worker, responsible for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Sasha Kulayeva believes that European citizens are well informed about the problems of democratic society in Belarus and human rights situation.

Sasha Kulayeva: *Action of solidarity in that year were organized in many countries. In Europe, there were organized a number of initiatives. The International Federation for Human Rights held also an action in social networks. The aim of the action was that everyone could via Twitter, Facebook or other social networks publish a call for the release of Ales Bialiatski. In this action took part more than 245,000 people. The action lasted two weeks. It is unfortunate that it also caused the arrest of human rights defenders in Belarus.*

- The Internet community very actively supported the action. But what are the results of the publication of these posts in the virtual space? Will officials in Minsk learn about this wave of solidarity?

Sasha Kulayeva: *Yes, this activity is extremely high and shows that European citizens are well aware of the situation of political prisoners in Belarus. Moreover, such organizations as English PEN-Club, Amnesty International, Freedom House, and hundreds of other individuals and organizations in America, Europe and Asia issued their statements. The statements were issued by the official government organizations from many countries. Street actions were carried out in Zurich, Paris, Prague, Warsaw, Vilnius and other cities. Belarusian society was supported even in Kirgystan, where the activists organized demonstration outside the embassy of Belarus. As for official information to the Belarusian authorities we have sent them a formal statement. This is of course not the first such statement. In addition, we refer in it to the UN decision declaring the arrest of Ales Bialiatski as illegal, and demand the release of the fighter for human rights. This document was sent once again to the Foreign Ministry of Belarus. Unfortunately, once again we received a reply that the decisions of the United Nations are not recognized as valid by the official Minsk. We realize that it is an outright lie. Because Belarus is a member of the UN, the standards established by this organization are binding for the Minsk officials.*

- Therefore, in spite of the world, state authorities are fighting not only with human rights defenders, oppositional politicians, but also with those who sympathize with them. What is the reason, in your opinion?

Sasha Kulayeva: *Unfortunately, this is true. At the same time, however, we have the opportunity to present our demands to the Belarusian authorities to immediately stop the persecution. As in Belarus it is impossible to express such demands. Our last action of this type was the demonstration in Brussels, during the visit of Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus. Overall, the situation remains difficult, both in terms of human rights and the situation of political prisoners in prisons. Political prisoners are not only deprived of their freedom, but are subject to torture and other ill-treatment. Prison administrations apply to these special measures pressure, limiting any possibility of normal contact with other prisoners. This leads to an increasing isolation. And such measures are used not only against Ales Bialiatski, but also against other political prisoners. For our part, as much as it is possible, we focus the public's attention in the West on this situation, we pass the information. It seems to me that a large part of the population of the European Union is aware of these facts.*

Ales Bialacki is one of three candidates for the Vaclav Havel prize in human rights field



The imprisoned head of the Human Rights Center "Viasna", Ales Bialacki, the Young Lawyers' Association (Georgia) and Rights Defence Network (China) – these are three candidates for Vaclav Havel prize in human rights field.

The qualifying committee consisting of independent activists under **Jean-Claude Mignon** leadership and the head of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) prepared, on the 28th August, a short list on the basis of the selection of 27 candidatures fulfilled the prize criteria.

As the website of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe announces, initially, the jury presents the list of six candidates: Ludmila Aleksejewa (Russia), Ales Bialacki (Belarus), the Young Lawyers' Association (Georgia), the Hungarian Helsinki Commitee (Hungary), the Psychological Centre of Disabled People's Protection (Hungary) and Rights Defence Network (China).

The Belorussian rights' counsellor was supported by over 30 Polish non-governmental organisations. The initiative of **Ales Bialacki** enrolment for the Havel prize belongs to the Stefan Batory Foundation.

"It is necessary to support and put in the limelight these people who take a responsibility for human rights defence and this is the only minimum of what we can do for them. This is the point of the prize existence", said Jean-Claude Mignon – the head of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe presenting voting results.

The winner surname will be announced by the head of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on the first day of the first autumn session on 30th September 2013 at 12.30 in Strasburg.

The purpose of the Vaclav Havel prize in human rights field is a support for eminent activists in human rights defence in Europe and abroad. The prize is awarded annually before the forum of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in cooperation with the Vaclav Havel Library and the fund called "Charter 77". The amount of the prize is € 60,000.